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ABSTRACT

Recently, the Communication Department at the University of Texas at Arlington offered an innovative news editing course taught collaboratively by a journalism professor and an editor of the "Fort Worth Star-Telegram," a metropolitan daily newspaper. In 1990 the course was continued on the model describes by R. L. Gates (1989), and in this class students had the opportunity to transfer the theories that they learned in the lecture to the laboratory. The subjects that were covered included: a study of the electronic newsroom, role of the copy editor, duties of the copy editor, leads, headline writing, photographs and cutlines, wire service news, libel, type, layout and supplemental material of broadcast editing, and magazine editing. The students also learned practical applications of copy editing tools, and received newsroom experience as they interacted with an academic journalist, an editor of a metropolitan newspaper, and staff personnel of the student newspaper. Participants' reactions to the lecture and laboratory sections of the course--evaluated by means of an attitude test in the form of a five-point Likert scale--were favorable. In addition, essay evaluations of the course submitted by faculty indicated that all agreed that in future courses, labs should meet every week or every other week with a maximum of four to six students in each 3-hour lab. Using a Macintosh format and adding a workshop were also suggested. The entire experience supported the principle of collaboration between academics and working editors. (Two tables are included; a list of collaborative teaching tips is attached.) (PRA)

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Marian Wynne Haber

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# Collaborative Teaching in Journalism

The Communication Department at the University of Texas at Arlington offered an innovative news editing course taught collaboratively by a journalism professor and an editor of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, a metropolitan daily newspaper. In the fall semester of 1990 I taught the lecture portion of the course in two-hour segments twice a week.

Editors are sometimes invited to lecture to journalism classes, but rarely are they included as an integral part of the classroom structure. They should be. So I invited Broc Sears, assistant managing editor for graphics at the Star-Telegram, to teach the laboratory.

Collaborative learning is covered extensively in scholarly journals, but the subject of collaborative teaching in college has received scant attention. One professor described her experience in the collaborative teaching of a technical communication course at the Catholic University of America (Gates, 1989).

Gates said that her collaboration began with a planning meeting attended by three academic and two industrial

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professionals. They formed a group of 10 representatives from academia and industry. Their goals were to assess the degree to which current writing programs met students' needs once they went to work, to consider ways programs might have to be changed in order to connect classroom learning more usefully to writing in the workplace, and to design a business writing course that would prepare students to work in corporations with differing standards.

The collaborators agreed not to convert each other to preconceptions, but would try to learn all they could from each other (p. 80). In their business writing course they developed a simulation of a corporate environment designed to include a wide range of situations that students might encounter and to tie writing to experiences within those situations. Sudents were asked to write documents from the perspective of various roles within a corporation. The aim was for student writers to learn from concrete situations about corporate culture as it affects writing.

A professor coordinated the course and students served as management interns. The company had three branches: research/technical, public relations/promotions, and administrative/management. Teams of two professionals, one academic and one industrial, designed and wrote assigments for each branch of the company. The class was limited to 15 students divided into three teams of five people each. Students also visited the offices of the corporate representatives.

Because of restrictions on time the academic instructor performed all grading. All students passed the course. Students evaluated the course in a Likert-scale measurement. They said they valued the chance to work with successful business managers. They said they were impressed by the range and styles of writing used by different companies.

The collaborative teachers said that their conversations helped team members understand why persons in the academic and industrial worlds so frequently misunderstand each other. Gates said, "Individuals could then use their new understanding of each other's problems and settings to improve their own work" (p. 86).

My Collaborative Teaching Experiment

I followed Gates' advice on advance planning and met with representatives of our college newspaper, Sears, and the administration of my university's Communication Department. Then I designed a syllabus so that the lecture would coordinate with the laboratory as closely as possible.

Students in the laboratory were divided into small groups of four or five, with each group meeting at least five times during the semester in three hour sessions. The editor taught each group in the the newsroom of The Shorthorn, the student newspaper at the university.

What made this class particularly effective is that students had the opportunity to transfer the theories that they learned in the lecture to the laboratory. They progressed from

practicing on workbook stories in the lecture to working with actual stories in their laboratory. The more advanced students had the most practice in editing stories that were published in their college newspaper. News editing students who were working on VDT terminals called up stories that reporters submitted to appear in the next issue of The Shorthorn.

Under the supervision of the laboratory instructor, news editing students edited stories for wordiness, redundancy, grammar, spelling, punctuation, AP style, appropriate style of writing to suit the story, and other standards. The laboratory experience provided a positive reenforcement of skills students learned in the lecture and practiced in workbook exercises. The textbook and workbook used in this course was Editing in the Electronic Era, second edition, by Martin L. Gibson, Iowa State University Press, 1984.

The subjects that were covered include: a study of the electronic newsroom, role of the copy editor, duties of the copy editor, leads, headline writing, photographs and cutlines, wire service news, libel, type, layout and supplemental material of broadcast editing, and magazine editing.

The goals were for students to write cutlines and headlines and assist with page makeup. By the end of the semester the future editors were supposed to see, save, and study their editing suggestions in a printed publication read by their fellow students.

The editors in training also learned practical applications

of copy editing tools as they used their proportion wheels to change the sizes of photographs and charts and their pica poles to measure all the components that go into newspaper layout. This was emphasized in the lecture portion. It could have been done in the laboratory if the groups met more frequently or were smaller in size.

Editor Sears stressed these skills in the laboratory:

1. Seek and use references to assist in the correction of grammar, style, spelling, and other necessities.

2. Find the nut graph and pull it up to the lead of the story.

3. Create a logical sequence of facts and events.

4. Cut fluff.

5. Edit a story so that it is to the point and interesting to read.

Not only was the editor willing to share his contemporary expertise in editing, but he said he welcomed the opportunity to scout talent for his newspaper.

Many journalistic points of view were imparted as students learned and practiced a myriad of editing skills as they interacted with an academic journalist, an editor of a metropolitan newspaper, and staff personnel of the student newspaper. They also received invaluable and practical newsroom experience by communicating with reporters before and after they edited their copy.

Course Evaluation

Participants' reactions to the course were evaluated by means of an attitude test in the form of a five-point Likert scale. (See Tables 1 and 2). Questionnaires were given to students to rate their opinions about the lecture and laboratory portions of the course. Open-ended questionnaires were also given to the editor and the Shorthorn newsroom personnel.

The five point scale consisted of (1) strongly agree (2) slightly agree (3) neutral (4) slightly disagree (5) strongly disagree. Students neither slightly disagreed nor strongly disagreed with any of the statements. Their attitudes about the lecture ranged from 1.5 to the statement, "The subject matter is taught at my level of comprehension," to 3.1 for "The content covered in the lecture correlated with what I practiced in the lab."

Two highly important statements, "I compare this course favorably with other journalism courses taught by one instructor" and "This course provided a meaningful learning experience for me" were both rated 2.1. In the comments section of the questionnaire one student said that more time should have been spent on layout and libel. Another felt that the class should enroll news editorial majors only and not students specializing in public relations.

Scores in the laboratory attitude test ranged from 1.4 for "I am pleased with the instructor's knowledge of the subject" to 3.5 for "I am pleased with the frequency in which we met of five times during the semester." In the comments portion 14 students

said that more lab time was needed to practice editing skills and one person said that he preferred a morning lab to an afternoon one.

The significant statements of "I compare this lab favorably with other journalism courses taught by one instructor" was rated 2.9 and "I believe that this class prepared me to practice copy editing skills after I graduate" was rated 3.4. "This lab provided a meaningful experience for me" was rated 2.5.

Essay evaluations of the course were submitted by the director and assistant director of student publications and the lab instructor. All three agreed that to be more effective labs should meet every week or every other week with a maximum of four to six students in each lab for three hours per lab. Because of insufficient lab time and varying ability, only about half of the students were considered proficient enough by lab personnel to edit actual stories that appeared in the student newspaper. The others practiced editing skills on previously published stories.

Sears suggested that future editing labs work from a Macintosh computer based format with real stories, art, and layout dummies supervised by an editor who teaches ten to twelve students at a time. He wrote, "They would put together a four-page laser writer output every week or every other week. The class would be divided into two teams that would meet for three hours each time. The first sessions would be an orientation, the next six would be broken down into one-half

hour news meetings, one and one-half hour editing, layout, headline writing, design, information-gathering, and one hour production and proofing session.

Dorothy Estes, director of student publications, wrote, "Students should be screened for interest in news/editorial experience and the course should be limited to students with basic language and journalism skills." She said that another possibility for a collaborative experience would be for an editor to teach four to five students from any regularly scheduled editing class while the remainder of the students would edit stories from a workbook under the supervision of the lecture instructor. She also suggested a three-day workshop prior to the semester to focus on design and headline writing. "This would introduce theory earlier and allow students more time to practice what they learned in the workshop," she said.

John Dycus, assistant director of student publications, suggested an increase of the frequency of newsroom interactions with student editors and editing students. He wrote, "Make this an honors class. Restrict the class to students with proven academic credentials or experience."

A Final Note

I agree with all the suggestions from my colleagues. However, despite the relatively short time that students met in the labs, I am still firmly committed to the principle of collaboration between academicians and working editors. I am pleased that students received three points of view from an

editor of a metropolitan daily newspaper, student newspaper personnel, and a journalism professor. While recognizing some shortcomings, I still consider our innovative class to be a success. I would encourage other journalism teachers to design a collaboratively taught editing class and to use collaboration in other communication subjects.

All 22 news editing students passed the course. The best way to measure the effectiveness of student performance in a collaboratively taught class would have been a pre-test post-test control group design. In it students of a collaboratively taught class and students in a traditional one-instructor class would be given a test before the class began and then another test when the class was completed. Then the results would be compared statistically. We lacked the time to compare performances.

I encourage teachers of other college subjects to teach collaboratively with professionals in their fields. Some subjects that are fertile for collaboratively taught classes are: radio-tv-film, business communication, public relations, drama, and photography.

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References

Gates, Rosemary L. (1989). "An Academic and Industrial Collaboration on Course Design." Journal of Business and Technical Communication, 3 (2), 78-87.

# Tips for Collaborative Teaching in Journalism

By Marian Wynne Haber

The University of Texas at Arlington

1. Select a course that could be improved by collaborative teaching.
2. Find a working professional that has some teaching experience and has the time and desire to do collaborative teaching.
3. The academician and the professional should design a syllabus so that the lecture and laboratory cover similar subjects. Students should be able to apply principles learned in lecture to their laboratory.
4. Give the purpose of the class. Describe your grading formula by what percentage of the grade is taken from lecture and what percentage from laboratory. Be specific
5. When the course ends, evaluate it by means of a five point Likert scale questionnaire and open-ended questionnaire given to students and co-teachers.
6. Incorporate sound suggestions if you offer the course again.
7. If you want to evaluate student performance in collaboratively taught classes versus students in traditional one-teacher courses, design a pre-test post-test control group. Test all students before the class begins and after the class has ended.
8. Write about your experiences in collaborative teaching so that others can learn from you and the literature on the subject will be expanded.